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TAGS: PREL CU SZ

SUBJECT: NEW SWISS AMBASSADOR RECEIVES INTRODUCTION TO  
U.S.-CUBA RELATIONS

Classified By: Chief of Mission Jonathan Farrar for reasons  
1.4 (d) and (b)

¶1. (C) Newly-arrived Swiss ambassador Peter Burkhard requested to meet with Chief of Mission (COM) on February 10 to share impressions from his initial contacts with the GOC. Burkhard said he had been surprised that his meeting with Vice President Almeida during his presentation of credentials ceremony had been dominated by U.S.-Cuba issues (95 percent of the meeting, according to Burkhard).

¶2. (C) Burkhard said that Almeida appeared to be following a careful script most of the time, with an initial reference to Switzerland's role as the protective power for the U.S. and Cuban Interests Section. When Burkhard offered to provide a channel for communication between the U.S. and Cuba, Almeida replied that we (Cuba and the U.S.) already have a channel. COM noted that in Havana this channel mostly was restricted to exchanges of diplomatic notes as the GOC had refused or not responded to a series of USINT offers to meet or provide briefings on a variety of issues over the past six months. Burkhard seemed surprised. COM added that Burkhard's predecessor had remarked that his GOC interlocutors often expressed irritation when he had raised issues regarding the United States or USINT's operations, and that Almeida's response thus was consistent with past GOC positions.

¶3. (C) Burkhard relayed that Almeida at one point in their meeting remarked that this was a time of great change and turmoil. Burkhard interpreted the remark as a reference to the global economic and financial crisis, and responded accordingly. Almeida's reply, according to Burkhard, was to clarify that he meant great change and turmoil in the United States, and in U.S-Cuban relations. Burkhard added that the one time Almeida appeared to veer from his script was during an agitated discourse on the necessity that the U.S. Supreme Court review the cases of the five Cubans convicted of espionage-related offenses in the United States and that the USG return all five to Cuba.

¶4. (C) Burkhard related that he found a similar focus on the United States in his initial call on Deputy Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez. The Deputy Minister spent almost the entire meeting on the results of the U.S. elections, and what they might mean for Cuba. Burkhard also said that Rodriguez asked aloud as to why there had been no USG message to Cuba from the new Administration. COM said that USINT had been repeating a consistent theme since November 4, namely that the Administration would focus on a wide range of issues around the world and that there are many pressing issues at the moment beyond Cuba. Burkhard replied that his impression is that the GOC sees Cuba as ranking high among U.S.

priorities and is uncomfortable with the notion that other priorities might be more pressing for us.

15. (C) Comment: Burkhard's impression of GOC discomfort is consistent with the irritation toward the USG expressed in Fidel's latest "Reflections" column. Such GOC impatience may actually play in our favor down the road. End comment.  
FARRAR